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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY SUCCESSION RACE: IS ZVINAVASHE THE ONE?

REF: A. HARARE 2286

[B](#). HARARE 1446

[C](#). HARARE ZI 2264

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer under Section 1.5(b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The retirement of Vitalis Zvinavashe as commander of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) and his emergence on the national political scene underscore uncertainties surrounding the ruling party's contortions over prospective leadership succession. His possible appointment as Vice-President could mute disappointment among competing aspirants and facilitate the ruling party's management of political-military relations, but he reportedly is unpopular among military officers, and his entrance into politics could bolster Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa's efforts to consolidate power and succeed President Mugabe. For his part, Mugabe gives no indication of planning to hand over the reins of power any time soon. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The announcement in early November that Zvinavashe was retiring effective December 31 had been rumored for some time. President Mugabe's remarks at his retirement party, commentary in the government media, and Zvinavashe's own reported comments indicate that he will play a role in ruling party politics, although precisely what role remains to be seen.

Old Soldier Not Ready To Fade Away

[1](#)3. (C) Although the ZDF brass generally has eschewed public involvement in politics, Zvinavashe's name has been featured in well-publicized political circumstances on several occasions. In late 2002, Zvinavashe and Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa reportedly sent an emissary to opposition leaders to discuss a Mugabe exit strategy. In the face of vocal criticism by party hard-liners, each denied involvement in such talks. Last year Zvinavashe also was reported to have urged the formation of a national task force to address the nation's economic situation, which he attributed to bad economic policy. Earlier, he created a stir in the run-up to national elections of March 2002 by stating publicly that the defense forces would not salute any political leader without liberation credentials, a clear slap at Tsvangirai. Notwithstanding his somewhat checkered public past, Zvinavashe's retention of the top military slot suggests the depth of Mugabe's reliance on him.

[1](#)4. (C) Upon announcement of his retirement, Zvinavashe publicly proclaimed his availability for national office and dismissed suggestions that he would take a "district" position. Early speculation on his likely political role revolved around the Masvingo provincial party chair or governorship; however, both of those slots were recently filled. That would appear to leave the Vice-Presidency or a slot in a rumored upcoming cabinet reshuffle. According to a family friend of Minister of Justice, Legal, and Parliamentary Affairs Patrick Chinamasa, Chinamasa's wife (who is the older sister of Zvinavashe's wife) said the late Vice President Simon Muzenda on his deathbed told Mugabe that he wanted Zvinavashe to succeed him as MP for Gutu North and as Vice-President. While Mugabe will not be bound by the dying wish of his trusted Vice-President, chief party strategist Muzenda's faith in Zvinavashe testifies to the defense chief's party loyalty and reliability and reflects positively on his standing for the Vice-Presidency in the President's eyes.

[1](#)5. (C) Complicating Zvinavashe's path to national office is that he must hold an MP slot in order to fill a vice-presidential or cabinet slot for more than three months. A constituency MP position might be of interest to Zvinavashe as a means to the vice-presidency. One open non-constituency MP slot reportedly is slated for another individual, but presumably could be made available to accommodate Zvinavashe should party priorities dictate. Indeed, more non-constituency slots could open should a rumored cabinet reshuffle take place.

Zvinavashe's Cache: Military Credentials...

16. (C) Sporting strong liberation credentials, the 60-year old Zvinavashe joined the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) in 1968 and has held his current position since 1994. With the MDC distracted and lying low, and the ruling party having steeled itself to international pressure and economic collapse, an increasingly disaffected military may pose the biggest threat to the ruling party's firm control. Mugabe and others in the party may calculate that Vice-President (or President) Zvinavashe would enhance ZANU-PF's management of a potentially restive and financially pinched military. It is not clear that it would, however. The cold and impersonal Zvinavashe is reputed to be unpopular among military colleagues, many of whom chafed at the lack of opportunity in a military that ossified at the top under his leadership.

... and Ethnic Ties

17. (C) To strengthen party unity and enhance party prospects in a national election, conventional wisdom dictates that the party's next leader should come from the Karanga ethnic subgroup, the largest within the dominant Shona tribe (Mugabe is from the Zezuru subgroup). A Karanga, Zvinavashe may be expected to help subdue the historical split that has re-emerged within an important Masvingo-based Karanga subgroup with the death of Vice-President Muzenda. Muzenda, the elder statesman in one of the Karanga subgroups, served to quell rivalry with the other subgroup. Other key members of the Muzenda Karanga subgroup are Mnangagwa, Minister of Foreign Affairs Stan Mudenge, and the presidentially appointed Governor of Masvingo province Josaya Hungwe. Party strategists reportedly hope that a relatively apolitical figure of Zvinavashe's stature would help to keep a lid on simmering rivalries in the key ZANU-PF heartland of Masvingo. But there are doubts that he alone could unify ZANU-PF in the province, much less stand up to the MDC in Masvingo were he to run. Indeed, some senior party officials reportedly already are trying to undermine Zvinavashe's position, stressing his lack of position/background in the party.

18. (C) The other Karanga subgroup is headed by ZANU-PF MP for Masvingo South and intellectual elder statesman Eddison Zvobgo, and also includes former Air Marshal Josaya Tungamirayi. In 1995 Tungamirayi challenged Muzenda for the ZANU-PF nomination for Gutu North, and he has publicly declared his intention to run for the seat now that it is vacant, placing himself as a potential rival to Zvinavashe were he to run. Tungamirayi is a relatively popular and potentially formidable political force in his own right. The power of this subgroup is unclear, though, as Zvobgo has been in a South African hospital since October 2003 when he was operated on for an undisclosed ailment.

19. (C) For now, the Muzenda Karanga subgroup appears to be in ascendancy, notwithstanding the death of its leader. Mnangagwa continues to be regarded by most as Mugabe's chosen successor. He remains the point person for ZANU-PF's empire of companies with special government privileges. The November 2003 ZANU-PF provincial elections resulted in Mnangagwa faithfuls Mutumwa Mawere and Daniel Shumba being elected as party provincial chairman and the newly created secretary for economic affairs respectively in Masvingo.

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Mawere and Shumba are both businesspeople with financial ties to Mnangagwa.

10. (C) As required in advance of the December 2003 ZANU-PF conference, the party has gone through a provincial restructuring exercise over the past few months. This exercise has resulted in officials reportedly friendly with, aligned with, or at least acceptable to Mnangagwa to be re-confirmed or substituted into party structures throughout the country, particularly in Midlands, Masvingo, and Manicaland. The restructuring exercise has not only been important on a backroom lobbying level, but per the ZANU-PF constitution provincial councils propose nominees for all of the national party positions, including President and Chairman of the party, at the party congress (to be held next in 2005). Some observers have suggested that Mnangagwa might take over from Mugabe as President of ZANU-PF sometime between December 2003 and the party congress in 2005, and that this would be a clear message to the broader party membership that Mnangagwa is the best candidate for the next head of state. With some Mnangagwa-friendly provincial structures in place already, Mnangagwa may already be engineering this scenario.

11. (C) As for Zvinavashe, he reportedly gets along well with Mnangagwa and shares business relationships with him through their companies. He presumably would prosper under a Mnangagwa presidency. Mnangagwa would not feel politically

threatened by a Vice-President Zvinavashe, who could be counted on to yield to the Speaker at the appropriate time. Indeed, one scenario has Zvinavashe taking Muzenda's vice-presidential slot as a stalking horse for Mnangagwa.

Succession Scorecard -----

-- Zvinavashe

¶12. (C) As a relative party outsider and newcomer to the political arena, Zvinavashe has not been subjected to the kind of political scrutiny that has taken a toll on other ostensible candidates to succeed Mugabe. Although unquestionably loyal to Mugabe (probably the most important eligibility criterion), Zvinavashe seems to lack charisma and broad support from within the party. In spite of his military credentials, the military hierarchy would likely be ambivalent to him as a presidential candidate. Rather than being a serious successor in his own right, more significant is the contribution he could make to Mnangagwa's position.

-- Mnangagwa

¶13. (C) Speaker of the Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa remains the favorite and is reputed still to have the nod from Mugabe himself. He has been on the hustings more than anybody, and Zvinavashe's elevation probably buttresses rather than rivals Mnangagwa's relatively weak support in the party. But Mnangagwa is not without significant liabilities: most notably his lack of broad party support, his record of ruthlessness in the Matabeleland massacres, and a label as unelectable in a free and fair election. Despite his ruthlessness and the fact that Mugabe elevated him through various Ministerial roles up to Speaker of Parliament, he is resented in quarters of the ZANU-PF hierarchy, most importantly Solomon Mujuru (Ref B). Additionally, his bungled approach through Colonel Dyke and Zvinavashe to MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai in late 2002 chafed Mugabe.

-- Simba Makoni

¶14. (C) A Mass Public Opinion Institute poll conducted in October demonstrated that "dissident" ex-Finance Minister Simba Makoni was the only party luminary who commanded broad national support without regard to provincial lines. This should weigh heavily for those in the party who want to compete realistically in a democratic process. Nonetheless, Makoni's lack of a strong political base in ZANU-PF and his liberal economic views, which are anathema to Mugabe, make him an unlikely choice. The introduction of hard-liner old guard politburo member Didymus Mutasa as a vice-presidential candidate reportedly was apparently designed to undercut emerging support for Makoni's candidacy within their home province of Manicaland.

-- Solomon Mujuru

¶15. (C) Notwithstanding the fact that retired Lieutenant-General Solomon Tapfumaneyi Mujuru, (nom de guerre Rex Nhongo) was named in a 2001 Zambian government report as having played a role in the 1975 assassination of then ZANU Chairman Herbert Chitepo, Mujuru reportedly enjoys significant support within the ZDF and the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO). Considered too rough-edged, uneducated and more of a kingmaker than a candidate, in 2002 he advanced Simba Makoni's name in succession discussions, and has consistently opposed Mnangagwa. After the March 2002 elections, and responding to assessments that the outcome was flawed he reportedly asked Mugabe when he intended to retire. More recent reports suggest he himself might want the job, or that he would support Secretary of Defense Sydney Sekeramayi in the race.

-- Sydney Sekeramayi

¶16. (C) If Sekeramayi's name is raised in succession discussions, it is usually in connection with Mujuru. Sekeramayi reportedly has played a low profile but respected role in the cabinet. However, he reportedly advocated economic reforms within the cabinet, which may have dropped him a peg in Mugabe's eyes and prejudiced his prospects. His credentials have not been extensively debated or discussed in public, and he may offer the appeal of not having as significantly negative a public image as others. A Zezuru, Sekeramayi has broad experience, having held various ministerial roles within ZANU-PF since independence, and has been active in ZANU since 1963.

-- Charles Utete

¶17. (C) Charles Utete, Cabinet Secretary since independence, is a dark horse candidate whose name emerges periodically. A Zezuru, he is deeply loyal to Mugabe and does not appear to have strong enemies. Utete generally has a reputation for integrity, although this has suffered outside the party with the release of his commission's report on land reform, which

avoided most difficult issues and drew careful "political" conclusions.

-- Others

118. (C) Several other names raised in succession debates months ago -- Party Chairman John Nkomo, Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, and Dumiso Dabengwa (Ref B) -- have received little serious public speculation as of late. Their Ndebele ethnicity makes Nkomo and Moyo unlikely candidates. The party's prominent hardline faction, including Moyo, Justice Minister Chinamasa, and Agriculture Minister Made, lack significant geographic constituencies, making them unlikely candidates. Nonetheless, through their control of key party levers of power (information, judicial administration, and land reform, respectively), they could exert meaningful influence on candidate selection.

Comment

119. (C) That Zvinavashe is being touted in official circles as potential vice-presidential (and by implication presidential) material underscores how murky the succession picture remains. None of the candidates stand above the rest, though Zvinavashe's entrance into politics tends to bolster Mnangagwa's ongoing -- and of late somewhat successful -- efforts to consolidate his position. Mnangagwa's evident liabilities, however, make his candidacy far from a foregone conclusion. The key variable for succession is Mugabe's intent, which remains unknown. While the international press has speculated that Mugabe might reveal his successor or a timeline for stepping down at the party conference this week in Masvingo, Party Spokesman Nathan Shamuyarira recently publicly declared what party members have been telling us in private: succession is not on the conference agenda. We are inclined to think that because Mugabe has not yet decided, a clear announcement is unlikely for some time.

SULLIVAN